

# Applications of quantum cascade lasers in chemical sensing

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## ABSTRACT

We show new results in modulating and modifying Quantum Cascade (QC) lasers to make them more suitable for chemical sensing spectroscopy. Spectroscopy results using QC lasers are demonstrated with whispering gallery mode  $\text{CaF}_2$  disc/ball, saturated absorption in hollow waveguide and direct chemical analysis in water.

## KEY WORD LIST

Current tuning, Mid Infrared, Whispering Gallery Mode, Quantum Cascade Laser, Saturated absorption, hollow waveguide, and water absorption

## INTRODUCTION

### Modulating and modifying QC Lasers for chemical sensing

A major challenge for QC laser application in chemical sensing spectroscopy is how to tune the laser frequency or wavelength over a range as wide as possible and at the fastest speed possible.

Distributed Feedback (DFB) QC lasers operate on inherently single frequency, but their tuning range is limited. We show that Continuous Wave (CW) QC DFB lasers, due to its high thermal load and relatively wide working temperature range, could tune over  $10\text{cm}^{-1}$  in a single current ramp pulse as short as  $100\mu\text{sec}$ , thus giving more capability for this kind of robust QC lasers for chemical sensing. In this paper, we tested the tuning range by using this laser to measure the  $\text{CO}_2$  dissolved in water. Due to strong absorption in the MIR by water, direct spectroscopic measurement of  $\text{CO}_2$  in water has been limited to optical path lengths of only dozens of microns, and measurable concentration resolution of only  $200\text{mg/L}$ . The high power and brightness of Quantum Cascade lasers could penetrate much deeper optical depths[1-3], i.e. 100s microns, and providing much higher averaging speed to achieve higher concentration resolution. We demonstrate that we could penetrate as deep as 800micron of water with our tunable EC QC laser built upon the amplifier above.

Even with  $10\text{cm}^{-1}$  tuning range, the DFB QC laser's tuning range is still well below the full gain bandwidth of QC lasers --- usually runs from  $60\text{cm}^{-1}$  to over  $400\text{cm}^{-1}$ . External cavity with grating could tuning the full range as to over  $400\text{cm}^{-1}$ , but compromised on tuning speed. We try to modify Fabry-Perot (FP) QC laser into multi-section structure and demonstrate the wide tuning capability with venier effect.

### Linewidths for hetero-structure epi lasers

#### *Near-IR DFB and External Cavity diode lasers*

DFB diode lasers are the most mature and stable single frequency laser sources, especially in the Near-IR (NIR) telecom band. However, the inherent high frequency noise in free-running (only constant current and temperature and without external frequency locking or stabilization) DFB NIR lasers broadens their Instantaneous Linewidths (ILW,  $<100\mu\text{sec}$  average) to over several MHz. This broadened ILW is actually a merit for DFB lasers working in the

telecom, because the broadened ILW will suppress noises generated in the long fiber loop by stimulated Raman scattering and other nonlinear effects.

The past experiments in the NIR with External Cavity (EC) diode laser with a grating as frequency selected feedback suggest that their ILW is much narrower, and  $\sim 500\text{kHz}$  was demonstrated[4] by high precision spectroscopy or high Q cavities, and in telecom more often by Delayed Self-Homodyne RF analysis[5].

The frequency drift, i.e. over msec time scale, of a free running single frequency NIR diode laser under constant temperature ( $\pm 0.1^\circ\text{C}$ ) and bias current is much larger. This large drift is a result of the varying background temperature causing the internal temperature to drift, and also drift of the current in the laser driver.

#### *Linewidths of DFB and EC Quantum Cascade Lasers*

Free running DFB QCLs are expected to have much narrower ILW than those of conventional Near-IR (NIR) diode lasers operating at the same power. This is because the photon energies are smaller, the cavities are longer (2mm versus 0.2 mm) and the linewidth enhancement parameter  $\alpha$ , or  $\alpha$ , is expected to be near zero. The first two of these factors reduce the Schawlow–Townes linewidth[6], while the large  $\alpha$  parameter of NIR diode lasers typically increases the free-running ILW by factors of 10–40 above the Schawlow–Townes limit. It is demonstrated that with low noise drivers, free running DFB QCLs could achieve a linewidth of 150kHz, and the Schawlow–Townes linewidth could be much less than 100kHz for many DFB QCLs[7, 8]. But, detailed spectroscopy evidence was not demonstrated. Frequency stabilization of QCLs further decreases ILW and long term drift to kHz level and facilitates sub-Doppler spectroscopy, but the stabilization setup which involve external cavity or external saturated absorption is quite complicated[8].

So far, a linewidth of 3.99MHz has been demonstrated for a Mid-IR EC QCL[9], and further stabilization on the EC QCL should prove much finer linewidth like ECL diode lasers stabilized in the NIR. Similar ILW for DFB QC Lasers were reported, and simple external locking has only been able to reduce long term drift and ILW is still several MHz[10]. There is hope that with improved low noise driver, the DFB QCL and EC QCL could achieve linewidths below a couple of 100kHz without complicated external locking. Here, we investigate the ILW for EC QCL based on the amplifier design above and also for the commercial DFB QCL.

#### *How to measure and characterize the ILW of QC lasers and applications*

So far, the ILW has to be verified by Saturated Absorption (SA) or cavities with ultrahigh Q in the MIR for EC QCLs.

The ultra narrow Doppler free linewidth of stable molecules is a good benchmark gauge for the ILW of QC lasers, be them DFB or EC QC lasers. We could conduct them easily in a compact setup, e.g. [Hollow Waveguide \(HW\)](#). Compared with traditional free space overlapped counter propagating SA setup, the tight overlap is guaranteed in a hollow waveguide as long as the laser could be efficiently coupled into the waveguide. We demonstrated that the coupling efficiency is over 50% for semiconductor epi lasers, e.g. QC lasers, due to QC laser's high brightness[11]. The transmission loss of HW is also quite low, only about 1-2dB/meter, making it an ideal platform for SA spectroscopy.

To measure the 100kHz linewidth of a DFB or EC QCLs with a high Q cavity at  $5\mu\text{m}$  ( $6 \times 10^{13}\text{Hz}$ ), the Q should be over  $6 \times 10^8$ , and a [whispering gallery mode cavity](#) based on Fluorite crystal discs should be able to realize such Q easily.

#### **Applications of Saturated Absorption and WGM in the Mid-IR**

The application of Doppler free ultra-high resolution SA spectroscopy in the MIR had been forecasted ever since its first demonstration[12]. Basically, the Doppler limited spectroscopy has a frequency over resolution of  $\sim 6 \times 10^5$ , e.g. at

2,000 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  and Doppler limited resolution of 0.003 $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , while the Doppler free SA's spectroscopic resolution, i.e. 100kHz or  $3 \times 10^{-6} \text{cm}^{-1}$ , will lead to nearly 3 orders magnitude increase of information and enable the differentiation of many chemical species previously impossible, e.g. nuclei isomers[13], magnetic hyperfine structures. The major obstacles for SA have been the lack of tunable lasers in the MIR, where the molecules have strong enough absorption to create SA, and the complicated platform of SA spectroscopy. Now, with widely tunable QC and intersubband MIR lasers, and the hollow waveguide, SA could be easily used for real world applications, e.g. the identification of isotopomers of heavy molecules, e.g. UF<sub>6</sub>, SF<sub>6</sub>[14], ethane[15], propane.

It has generated lots of interests in the past decade as Whispering Gallery Mode resonators can have ultra-high Q factors over a wide wavelength range in a tiny cavity, which usually could not be realized with conventional cavities with dielectric coatings[16, 17]. The paths of the WGMs lie very close to the surface of the resonator with a portion of the electromagnetic (EM) wave traveling outside, i.e. evanescent wave. Losses due to absorption or scattering of the evanescent wave outside the resonator will change the Q factor of the resonator. Several groups demonstrated that WGM resonators could be used for absorption sensing in gases and liquids, detection of refractive index changes around the resonator and single molecules on its surface[18, 19]. All chemical sensing studies performed until now with WGM used near-IR and visible continuous wave (CW) single frequency lasers because of the wide availability of such lasers and detectors. However, mid-Infrared (MIR) and far-Infrared (FIR) regions of the spectrum are much more important for chemical sensing because the fundamental bands of vibrations lying in these regions are 1~3 orders of magnitude stronger than their near-infrared overtones. However, there are some difficulties in realizing MIR/FIR coupled WGMs, i.e. there are very few choices of single mode fibers in the MIR/FIR, and the most common fused silica material is not transparent in that range, and finally CW QCL sources are still far from as popular as telecom CW diode lasers, but the latest improvements in QCLs bode well for their applications.

Because of the high brightness of QCLs, we recently demonstrated that the radiation of a QC laser could be efficiently coupled into a 300 $\mu\text{m}$  diameter hollow waveguide and used as a microliter gas sensor in gas chromatography. We also demonstrate that pulsed QCLs, in spite of their relatively large linewidth, could be efficiently coupled into WGM cavities.

In this paper, we demonstrate, to the best of our knowledge, the first SA spectroscopy of molecules in a hollow waveguide with unprecedented overlap and saturated intensity. Also, we demonstrate, the first observation of WGM spectra with Q well over 1 million in the MIR excited with a CW laser.

## EXPERIMENT

### Fast and Wide Frequency Tuning with Low duty cycle current ramp pulses

The schematic for fast and wide frequency tuning for DFB QC lasers is given in figure 1. The laser output is collimated and coupled into a WGM cavity with 0.47 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  Free-Spectra Range (FSR), and by counting the period in each current ramping cycle, we could calculate the frequency tuning range as well as mode purity or mode hopping. The results will be presented at the conference, and preliminary results are shown in figure 3a through 3h.

### Water penetration and CO<sub>2</sub> measurement

We setup the water penetration test as shown in figure 2d. We also flow pure CO<sub>2</sub> in the open air beam path to get gas phase CO<sub>2</sub> absorptin features in our scan, see figure 2b. We are able to observe reasonable signal to noise ratio scans even when water depth is over 500 $\mu\text{m}$ .

### WGM observation with DFB QCL

The setup is similar to the experiment where we demonstrated the pulsed QCL coupling into WGM reported last year. The detector has a bandwidth of 20MHz, and the scan rate of the DFB laser has to be slow enough to let the detector resolve the sharp features of the WGM spectra. But at slow scanning rate, the jitter of the DFB QC laser will become

the major limiting factor. The free running DFB QC lasers have been demonstrated to have an estimated bandwidth of over 10MHz at 1μsec scale. Therefore, the observable Q at 2,280cm<sup>-1</sup> will be limited to 8x10<sup>6</sup>.

We carefully adjusted the angle of incidence (AOI) of the QCL beam at the hypotenuse face so that only the lowest order WG modes, i.e.  $q = 1$ , are excited. We achieved near single mode excitation for  $q = 1$  WG modes when we adjust the AOI of QCL at the hypotenuse to be slightly above the critical angle for total internal reflection to happen at the ZnSe and CaF<sub>2</sub> interface, which is 35.3° at 4.5μm wavelength. As AOI getting closer to this critical angle, the WGM structure starts to simplify.

We obtained CaF<sub>2</sub> discs by OEwaves using procedures for fabricating high Q CaF<sub>2</sub> WGMs[20], we also fabricated CaF<sub>2</sub> and BaF<sub>2</sub> discs with different morphology on the outskirt. Results of these high Q WGM resonators will be obtained in the coming weeks.

### Saturated Absorption in Hollow Waveguide with EC and DFB QCL

We coupled laser output from our EC and DFB QCL into the 300μm ID HW, and achieved >50% coupling and over 40% output after 0.5meter HW length. The laser output from the other side of the HW is back reflected with a concave gold coated reflector, matching the Numeric aperture of the HW. The back-reflected signal is sampled by a ZnS beam splitter and detected by a MCT detector. The ZnS beam splitter has a Fresnel reflectivity of >20% at each surface at 45° Angle of incidence, and therefore a total of 4% each face of power is reflected into the detector after double passing the HW.

## RESULTS

Figure series 2 show the water absorption spectra in the MIR, and the optical pathlength is severely limited by the strong MIR absorption by water to 10s microns for FTIR instrument. With QC lasers, we demonstrated that could have reasonable signal to noise ratio of 4:1 even when the water depth is over 500μm.

Figure series 3 show the WGM spectra. A maximum WGM coupling induced loss of 10% is observed when optimized. The period spacing between the WGM spectra is measured to be ~0.45cm<sup>-1</sup>, which is calibrated with an air spaced Ge etalon with a Free Spectral Range of 0.075cm<sup>-1</sup>. This value is consistent with the size of the CaF<sub>2</sub> ball lens, i.e. 5mm diameter. In fact, we noticed that the WGM modes for this 5mm CaF<sub>2</sub> ball are much simpler at 4.46μm, when compared to the case at 1.55μm, i.e. with the same setup at the critical AOI for 1.55μm as shown in the insert of figure 2. We attribute this reduction in the number of WGM dips to the facts that we are using a 4.46μm laser, instead of a 1.5μm laser. The longer wavelength laser reduces the equator's WGMs to almost single  $q=1$  operation under the critical AOI coupling. The measured Q is over 2x10<sup>6</sup> in the MIR of 2,280cm<sup>-1</sup>.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Thermal tuning capability of DFB QC lasers versus DFB Diode lasers

Here, we calculate the change of resonance wavelength and frequency for DFB lasers with every Kelvin change in core temperature. The equations go out like this,

$$\lambda_{\text{DFB}} = 2n\Lambda/m; \quad \text{or} \quad d\lambda_{\text{DFB}}/dT = (2\Lambda/m) dn/dT;$$

$$\text{or,} \quad d\lambda_{\text{DFB}}/dT = (\lambda_{\text{DFB}}/n) dn/dT$$

Where  $\lambda_{\text{DFB}}$  is the resonance wavelength,  $n$  is the refractive index,  $\Lambda$  is the pitch of the grating and  $m$  is the order of the grating  $T$  is the grating waveguide temperature which is just above the active region (AR).  $dn/dT$  is a material

constant and varies little as long as InP composition does not change much from diode laser to QC laser, and so let's define a quasi constant  $\beta = dn/dT/n$ , and we get:

$$dv_{\text{DFB}}/dT = -(c/\lambda_{\text{DFB}}^2) d\lambda_{\text{DFB}}/dT = -(c/\lambda_{\text{DFB}}) \beta = v_{\text{DFB}} \beta$$

$$\text{and, } d\lambda_{\text{DFB}}/dT = \lambda_{\text{DFB}} \beta$$

The latest result on a high temperature (423K) operation DFB QCL centered at 9 $\mu\text{m}$  (1,100 $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) gives a  $\beta$  value of 7.9 $\times 10^{-5}/\text{K}$ , and a thermal power load tuning rate of 1 $\times 10^{-3}/\text{W}$  for epi-up mounting, and 0.52 $\times 10^{-3}/\text{W}$  for epi-down mounting[21].

Telecom DFB diode lasers have a typical tuning rate of 0.08~0.12nm/K at 1.5 $\mu\text{m}$  or 10~15GHz/K, and 0.06~0.08nm/K or 18~24GHz/K at 1 $\mu\text{m}$ [22] --- which are also consistent with the  $\beta$  value above for QC DFB lasers and also conclusions below.

So, we could draw the following conclusions for thermal tuning with DFB QC or diode lasers

- For the DFB lasers, regardless of QC or telecom diode, the temperature tuning frequency and wavelength rates both are proportional to the center wavelength or frequency. Therefore, for the same every Kelvin change in core temperature, QC laser in the mid-IR, e.g.  $\lambda=4.5\mu\text{m}$ , tunings 3 times as fast as in wavelength, but 1/3 as slow as in frequency compared to diode lasers, e.g.  $\lambda=1.5\mu\text{m}$ .
- The tuning rates are not related to grating order or pitch.
- If we could change the AR temperature over 200K, e.g. through electric heating while maintaining the submount at low temperature, e.g. -50°C or 223K, and assuming the maximum temperature for the active region is 430K, then we should have over 30 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (80nm) tuning range at 2,000 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  center frequency (5 $\mu\text{m}$  wavelength); or over 15 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (160nm) tuning range at 1,000 $\text{cm}^{-1}$  center frequency (10 $\mu\text{m}$  wavelength).

#### Current tuning capability of DFB lasers through thermal heating effect only

The compliance voltage for QC lasers (7v~17v) is about 5 ~ 10 times larger than diode lasers (1.5V typical), and efficiency (<10%) is negligible when compared to diode lasers (>35%), therefore the thermal power deposited on the QC lasers is about 10 times larger than diode lasers for the same current level or density.

The threshold current and current tuning dynamic range is also about 10 to 100 times higher for QC lasers, however, due to the fact that the width and length for QC lasers are much larger than telecom diode lasers (typical numbers are 10 $\mu\text{m}$  versus 2 $\mu\text{m}$  in width, and 3mm versus <1mm in length), the current density for threshold current and current tuning dynamic range is only marginally higher for QC lasers compared to telecom diode lasers.

With BH structure, the thermal conductivity for QC lasers is similar to diode lasers, and so the thermal resistance is reduced, and typical thermal resistance of 10~20K/W is available for epi-up mounting and 10k/W or less for epi-down mounting[23]. Whereas, BH diode lasers have a thermal resistance of 100k/W due to its smaller footprint[22].

If the thermal resistance is ~100K/W for diode laser and <10~20K/W for QC lasers, for the same every mA current change, the temperature change is about the same for diode and QC DFB lasers. In order to thermally heat the AR over 200K, we need 20W to 10W power which means over 1A current is needed. This might be over the maximum current limit already, and therefore we need to increase the thermal resistance. One way to increase thermal resistance is to increase the stripe width of the AR, and also use less gold deposition for ridge structures, and use epi-up mounting instead of epi-down mounting.

For telecom diodes, the maximum current is usually around 100mA, and therefore, the tuning range is limited to 150GHz, or  $5\text{cm}^{-1}$ , corresponding to an AR temperature increase of 10K; and for VCSEL, the  $R_{th}$  (thermal resistance) is  $>1,000\text{K/W}$ , and the heating effect is much stronger. QC laser will have a thermal tuning effect falling between the VCSEL and a telecom diode, because of the total power is higher due to high working voltage, while its  $R_{th}$  is actually the smallest.

### **Thermal tuning response dynamics and Low duty cycle wide range tuning**

The epi-down versus epi-up mounting will change the total temperature gradient from the AR core under static conditions, i.e. the current is held at constant; but during fast current ramp heating process, the gradient could be a lot higher than the static temperature gradient under a constant thermal load.

If the QC laser has a low average power load, then the Active Region (AR) temperature will stay close to the lowest temperature possible by the TEC controlled submount. The maximum current will be decided by the maximum current density, as well as maximum AR temperature. It is possible to tune the thermal resistance, e.g. using larger AR width which increases the thermal resistance, or epi-down instead of epi-up to increase the thermal resistance so that the device's maximum current will be decided by the maximum AR temperature rise. Then, it is possible to apply a low duty cycle pulse to the QC laser, maintaining the lowest possible initial or zero current AR temperature.

An example pulse sequence could have a repetition rate of 1kHz, and the pulse will first maintain zero current for 900 $\mu\text{sec}$ , and let the AR temperature return to the submount temperature; then the pulse go from zero current to threshold in no time, i.e.  $<0.5\mu\text{sec}$ , and the AR temperature is close to submount temperature; and then ramp to maximum current allowed by the maximum AR temperature in about 100 $\mu\text{sec}$ , then return to zero current for a repeating cycle. In this cycle, the average injected thermal power is only a fraction, 100% or less, of the full duty cycle ramp pulses.

### **Thermal tuning coupled with multisection venier frequency tuning**

The epi-down versus epi-up mounting will change the total temperature gradient from the AR core under static conditions, i.e. the current is held at constant; but during fast current ramp heating process, the gradient could be a lot higher than the static temperature gradient under a constant thermal load.

### **Measuring CO<sub>2</sub> in water**

The absorption by water in the MIR is the major limiting factor for any chemical analysis by optical absorption spectroscopy. Traditional FTIR spectroscopy setups only have 10s of microns optical depths. Here, the QC lasers have high power output concentrated in a narrow bandwidth, the brightness is several orders of magnitude higher than FTIR, and the repetition average is much higher as well. We hope to apply this technique for the Monitoring, Verification and Accounting (MVA) of underground brine CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration. We expect to achieve a resolution of 0.2mg/L.

### **Saturated absorption inside hollow waveguide**

The currently demonstrated SA linewidth of 10MHz is mainly limited by the laser stability. If a stabilized laser, i.e. driven with low noise drive, the laser linewidth should be close to 100kHz. Then, we could realized much higher resolution with SA in the HW.

The linewidth of the Saturated Absorption for stable molecules, e.g. CO<sub>2</sub>, is determined by several factors in the waveguide. The first is the transit time of the molecules inside the optical field due to the relatively small diameter of the HW. The transit time induced linewidth is calculated to be roughly following this equation,

$$D_{\text{wall}} * \Delta v_{\text{tr}} \sim 100\text{kHz} * \text{mm},$$

where  $D_{\text{wall}}$  is the dimension of the hollow waveguide, i.e.  $350\mu\text{m}$ , and  $\Delta\nu_{\text{tr}}$  is the transit time limited linewidth will be  $300\text{kHz}$ . At a pressure of  $\sim 0.05\text{Torr}$ , the pressure broadening ( $\sim 4\text{MHz/Torr}$  for  $\text{CO}_2$ ) will be  $200\text{kHz}$  --- less than transit time broadening. This means that the hollow waveguide could be coupled with GC and vacuum interfaced to provide ultra-high resolution spectroscopy analysis, if column switch is used to trap individual chemical peaks inside a long HW for analysis.

### WGM spectra in $\text{CaF}_2$ ball/disc

Since the energy loss in the ball is dominated by scattering loss, and  $Q$  is therefore proportional to the cube of the wavelength, as given in equation[24]:

$$Q \approx \frac{3\lambda^3 a}{8n\pi^2 B^2 \sigma^2}$$

where  $\lambda$  is the wavelength,  $a$  is the radius of the WGM cavity,  $n$  is the refraction index of the resonator material,  $B$  is the correlation length, and  $\sigma$  is the roughness. For the same  $\text{CaF}_2$  ball, we expect to observe  $\sim 23$  times higher  $Q$  at  $2,280\text{cm}^{-1}$  than at  $6,450\text{cm}^{-1}$ . Instead, we only observed roughly 4 times higher  $Q$ . The missing  $Q$  could be obscured by the limited resolution of our laser, as shown in figure 3f, we will use a Newfocus LB1005 fast servo-controller to stabilize the laser to the sharp WGM fringes. Two WGM cavities could be used, one will stabilize the QC laser and scan the laser frequency by applying a PZT voltage to the cavity, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> WGM cavity will monitor the linewidth of the stabilized QC laser.

As demonstrated with fluorite crystalline WGM cavities in the near IR, a  $\text{CaF}_2$  WGM resonator could potentially achieve values over  $10^9$  for the  $Q$  factor at  $1.5\mu\text{m}$  after careful polishing and annealing. Because of the longer wavelengths in the MIR and FIR, the main  $Q$  limiting factor will no longer be the surface scattering loss but the material absorption. This lower requirement on surface quality will make WGM sensors more robust in the MIR/FIR, i.e. they would be less sensitive to dust and environmental changes.  $\text{CaF}_2$  already starts to have higher absorption at the wavelengths over  $4\mu\text{m}$  and limit its  $Q$  at  $4.5\mu\text{m}$  to below  $10^9$ , while  $\text{BaF}_2$  could be a better candidate if we need to use longer IR wavelengths or get even higher  $Q$  factors at  $4.5\mu\text{m}$ .

Although fluorite crystalline WGMs resonators potentially have very high  $Q$ s in the MIR/FIR, this does not translate into very long effective path length for chemical sensing, especially if we try to sense gas phase chemicals. This is because the evanescent wave only accounts for a small portion of the Electro Magnetic (EM) field of the WGMs, and only the evanescent wave interacts with external chemicals. The fraction of the WGM's energy in the evanescent field depends on the refractive indices inside and outside resonator. For gas phase sensing, this fraction,  $f$ , is only  $\sim 1\%$  or less[19]; while for liquid phase,  $f$  could be as high as  $30\%$ [18]. Therefore, with the  $Q$  value of  $>10^8$  in the gas phase and  $>10^7$  in the liquid phase, the effective sensor path length would exceed 1 meter. One meter path length would be sufficient for liquid sensing but in the gas phase it is much shorter of the path lengths provided by multipass cells ( $1\sim >100$  meters) and cavity enhanced methods ( $>1,000\text{meters}$ ). However, WGM sensors could be used in applications that require small sample volume or overall small size of the sensors. For example, they could be used as inline sensor for Gas Chromatography (GC). With a one meter path length one could detect ppbV concentrations of  $\text{CO}_2$ , which would exceed the sensitivity of the mainstream GC sensors.

### CONCLUSION

We analyzed the thermal induced frequency tuning mechanisms in QC lasers, and report the improved modulation and modification scheme for improving the tuning range and speed of QC lasers. The applications of widely tunable single frequency laser, i.e. measuring chemicals in water, and coupling with the hollow waveguide and Whispering Gallery Mode cavity and use as sensors for chemicals are demonstrated and discussed.

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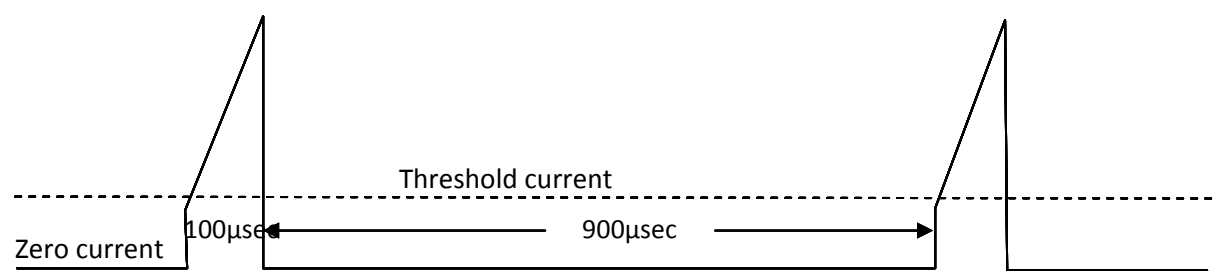
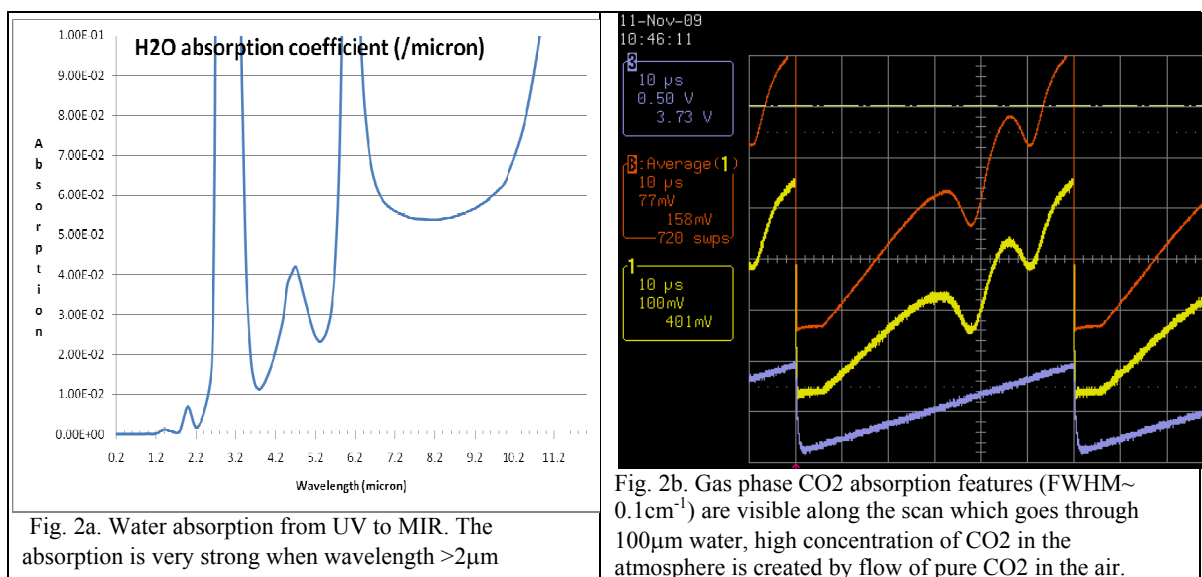


Figure 1. Low duty cycle wide frequency tuning current ramping scheme. The low duty cycle will give the lowest initial AR temperature, and fast pulsing will realize 200K localized temperature gradient.





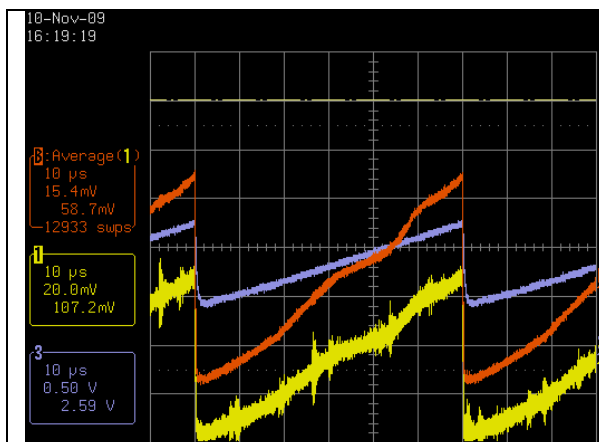


Fig. 2c. Scan of the QC laser at 2,280cm<sup>-1</sup>, and the optical depth of water is 500μm, noise flow is about 5mV.

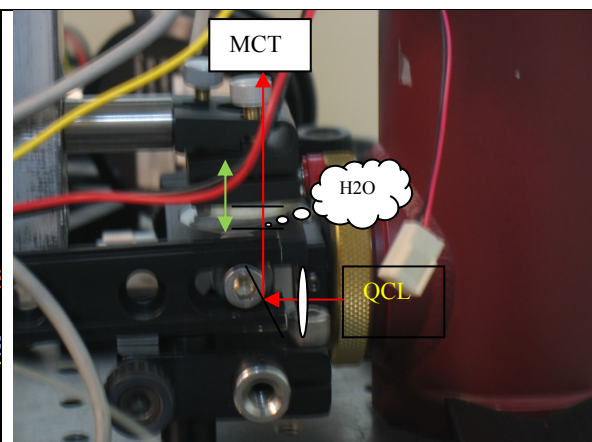


Fig. 2d. Experimental setup of the water penetration and measurement of CO<sub>2</sub> dissolved in water. Test laser is a CW cryogenic cool QC laser with power of 30mW.

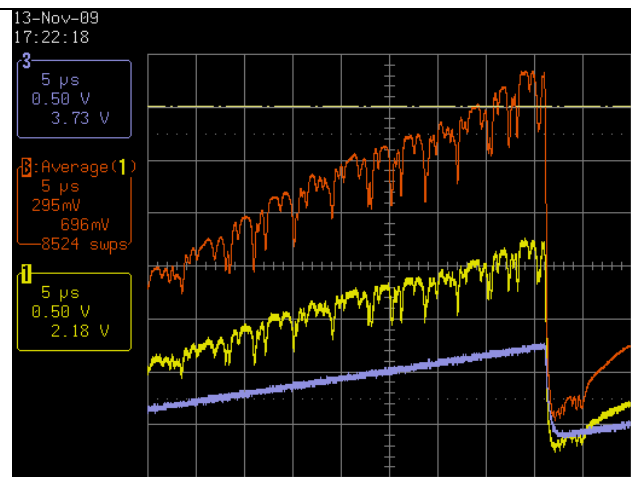


Fig. 3a. Coupling angle smaller than critical angle from ZnSe to CaF<sub>2</sub>

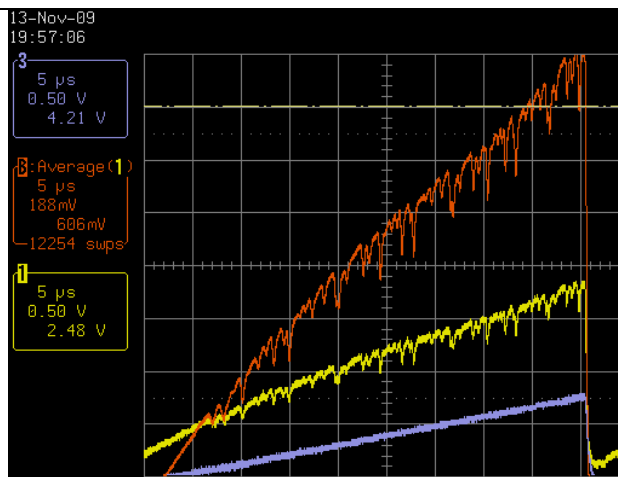


Fig. 3b. Coupling angle closer to critical angle from ZnSe to CaF<sub>2</sub>

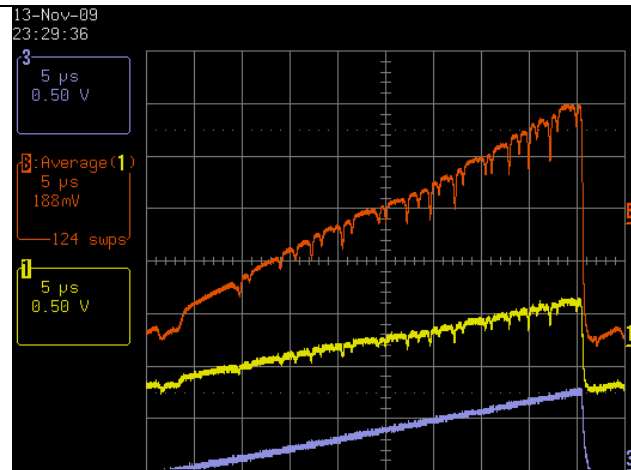


Fig. 3c. Coupling angle  $\sim$ critical angle from ZbSe to  $\text{CaF}_2$ , resulting much reduced simplified spectra

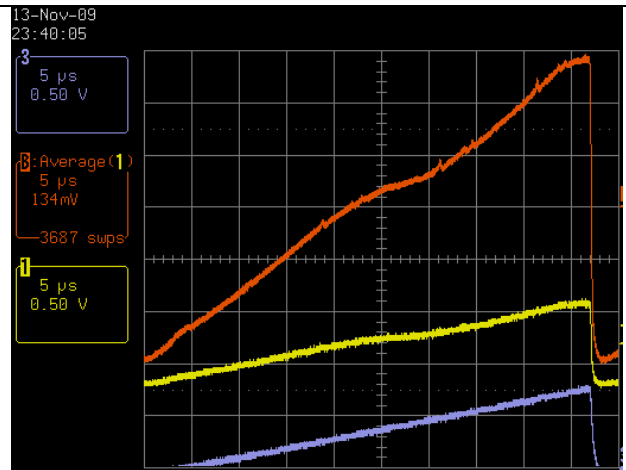


Fig. 3d. Coupling angle  $>$  critical angle from ZS to CF, only reversed spectra are observed

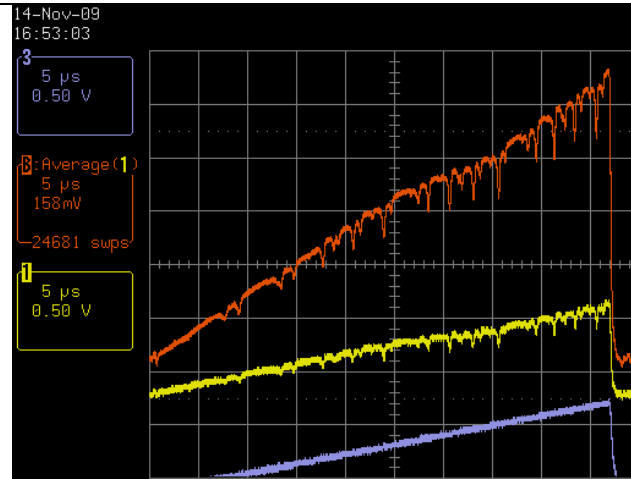


Fig. 3e. WGM spectra with period about  $75\mu\text{sec}$  or  $0.47\text{cm}^{-1}$  FSR. Tuning speed is obviously slowed down at threshold, and as high as  $22\text{cm}^{-1}/\text{A}$  is demonstrated at twice the threshold.

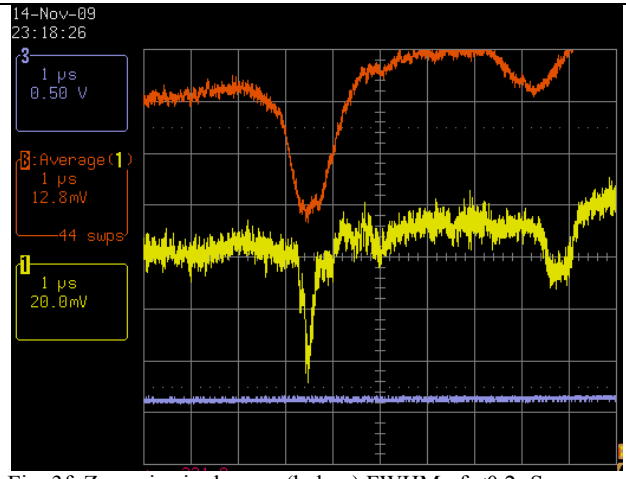


Fig. 3f. Zoom-in single scan (below) FWHM of  $<0.2\mu\text{Sec}$ , or  $\sim 0.001\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The Q should be larger than  $2 \times 10^6$  at  $2,280\text{cm}^{-1}$ . The averaged scan (upper) has much larger linewidth due to laser's unstable frequency nature.

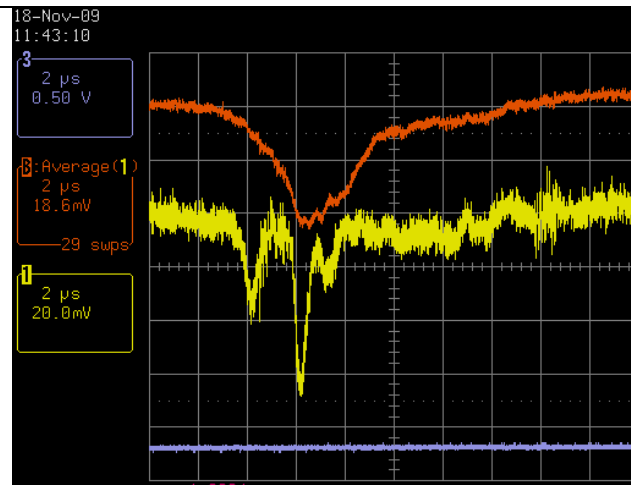


Fig. 3g. Average (Top) WGM spectra dip has drastic different structure to the Single scan (Bottom) WGM spectra dip

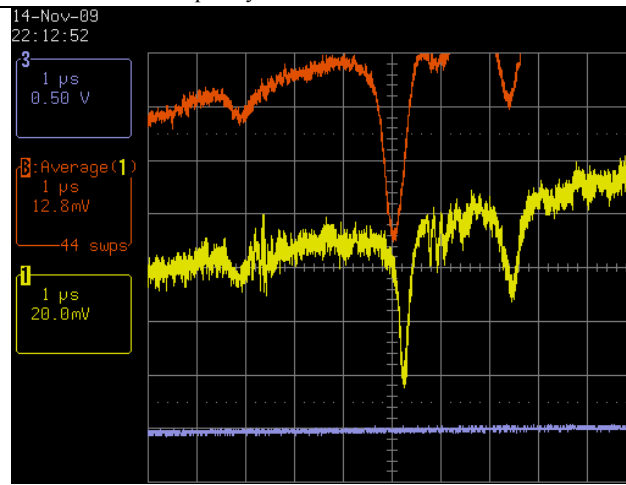


Fig. 3h. Similar scans to figure 3g, Broadening is obvious for the Averaged spectra dip.

indicating unstable QC laser.

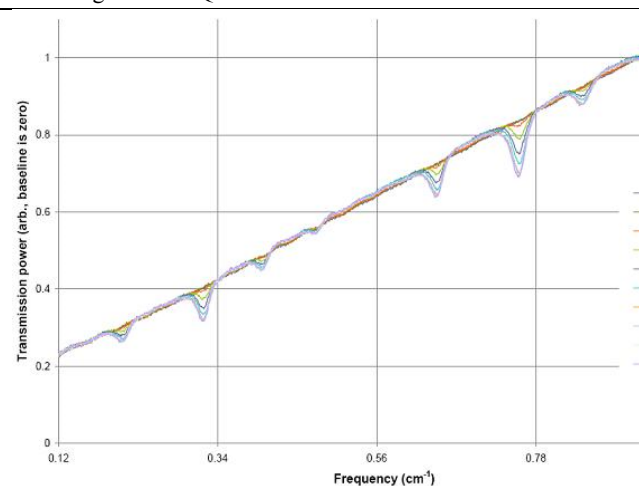


Fig. 3g. With pulsed DFB QCL, the FWHM linewidth is about  $0.02\text{cm}^{-1}$ , limited by the pulsed laser's resolution

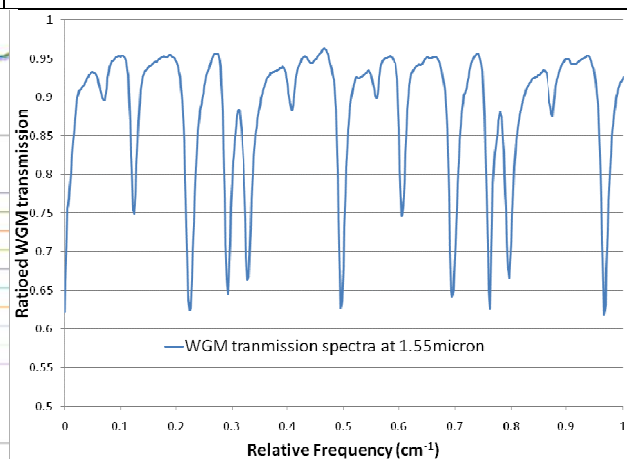


Fig. 3h. With External cavity laser at  $1.55\mu\text{m}$ , the scan with same  $\text{CaF}_2$  ball lens shows linewidth about  $0.01\text{cm}^{-1}$ ,  $Q$  is about  $6 \times 10^5$ , limited by the scattering loss at  $1.55\mu\text{m}$ .